

Ideology in Political Speeches of World Leaders: A Rhetorical and Discourse Analysis

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Input : May 05, 2025
Accepted : June 25, 2025

Revised : May 18, 2025
Published : June 30, 2025

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dimensi ideologis yang tertanam dalam pidato politik para pemimpin dunia melalui perpaduan pendekatan retorika klasik dan analisis wacana kritis (AWK). Dengan menelaah pidato-pidato terpilih dari tokoh-tokoh seperti Barack Obama, Soekarno, Nelson Mandela, dan Martin Luther King Jr., penelitian ini mengidentifikasi bagaimana strategi retorika khususnya ethos, pathos, dan logos digunakan untuk membangun otoritas, menggugah emosi publik, dan merasionalisasi agenda politik. Analisis ini juga menunjukkan bahwa bahasa bukanlah sarana komunikasi yang netral, melainkan alat yang sangat kuat untuk membentuk realitas sosial, memperkuat ideologi dominan, dan melegitimasi hubungan kekuasaan. Dengan menggunakan kerangka AWK dari Fairclough dan van Dijk, penelitian ini mengungkap pola-pola seperti oposisi biner, pemingkanaan metaforis, dan penggunaan strategis pronomina untuk membentuk identitas kelompok dalam (in-group) dan kelompok luar (out-group). Temuan-temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pidato politik berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai cerminan dari konteks historis dan sosiopolitik, tetapi juga sebagai alat reproduksi ideologis. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya literasi kritis dalam membongkar bahasa politik di era pengaruh media global.

Kata Kunci: pidato politik, ideologi, retorika, analisis wacana kritis, pemimpin dunia.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the ideological dimensions embedded in the political speeches of world leaders through the combined lenses of classical rhetoric and critical discourse analysis (CDA). By examining selected speeches from figures such as Barack Obama, Soekarno, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jr., this research identifies how rhetorical strategies particularly ethos, pathos, and logos are employed to construct authority, mobilize public emotion, and rationalize political agendas. The analysis further reveals that language is not a neutral vehicle of communication, but a powerful instrument for shaping social reality, reinforcing dominant ideologies, and legitimizing power relations. Using CDA frameworks by Fairclough and van Dijk, the study uncovers patterns such as binary oppositions, metaphorical framing, and strategic use of pronouns to create in-group and out-group identities. These findings confirm that political speeches function as both reflections of their historical and sociopolitical contexts and as tools of ideological reproduction. The research underscores the need for critical literacy in decoding political language in an era of global media influence.

Keywords: political speech, ideology, rhetoric, critical discourse analysis, world leaders

INTRODUCTION

Political speeches are among the most powerful forms of communication in human history. Throughout various pivotal moments across the globe, political speeches have functioned not only as instruments to deliver information, but also as tools to shape



public opinion, build collective identity, mobilize masses, and legitimize power. Prominent world figures such as Soekarno, John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, Nelson Mandela, and Angela Merkel are not only remembered for their policies but also for the strength of their rhetoric, which inspired generations and altered the course of history. Their speeches are now historical records and ideological texts that reflect how leaders construct sociopolitical realities for specific purposes. In this regard, political speeches serve strategic, symbolic, and even transformational roles within national and global contexts.

Language used in political speeches is far from neutral it is loaded with meaning, symbols, and interests. Language operates as an instrument of power, allowing leaders to shape perceptions, influence attitudes, and direct public behavior. In political discourse, the speaker is not merely an individual, but a representative of institutions and ideologies. Every word choice, syntactic structure, metaphor, repetition, and emotional tone is part of a deliberate rhetorical strategy designed to establish credibility (*ethos*), appeal to emotion (*pathos*), and present logical arguments (*logos*). For example, when a president speaks of a “war on terror” or “nation-building,” these expressions are imbued with ideological undercurrents such as nationalism, state sovereignty, or justification for policy directions.

To truly understand the power and depth of political speeches, one must go beyond surface-level interpretation. A multidimensional analytical approach is required namely through rhetorical criticism and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Rhetorical analysis allows us to explore persuasive techniques, while CDA uncovers how speech is used to construct, maintain, and reproduce power and ideology in society. CDA views language as a form of social action, shaped by and shaping historical, political, and cultural contexts. This approach does not only focus on what is said, but also on what is omitted, silenced, emphasized, or framed strategically to serve certain interests.

Ideology within political speeches is often subtly woven into narratives, symbols, argumentative structures, and speech patterns. Political leaders use language to define allies and enemies, establish a moral framework, and promote values they wish to normalize in public discourse. For instance, Winston Churchill’s wartime speeches emphasized endurance and patriotism as ideological resistance to fascism; Martin Luther King Jr.’s civil rights speeches echoed values of justice, freedom, and equality; while Soekarno’s nationalist rhetoric opposed imperialism and called for self-determination. These ideological threads are not just reflective, but formative they shape how societies understand themselves and others, influence policymaking, and legitimize political agendas.

Despite the richness of political speech, many existing studies tend to focus on thematic or contextual elements without deeply investigating the linguistic structures and ideological mechanisms at play. This research seeks to fill that gap by combining rhetorical analysis and CDA to uncover deeper meanings embedded in the speeches of global political figures. This approach enables a comprehensive examination of how language is crafted not only to persuade but to dominate, include, exclude, and represent. Especially in an era marked by disinformation, populist rhetoric, and political branding, such critical engagement is urgently needed.

Furthermore, in today’s globalized world, political communication transcends national borders. Speeches are broadcast internationally, shared across social media, and interpreted by diverse audiences. Political rhetoric thus plays a central role in shaping international perceptions, influencing diplomatic relations, and constructing global narratives of leadership, crisis, and national identity. Therefore, understanding the

ideological dimensions of such speeches is vital not only for political literacy but also for fostering a more critical and aware global citizenry.

By examining the ideological content of political speeches through rhetorical and discourse lenses, this study aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to the fields of linguistics, political communication, and the broader social sciences. It also serves as a call for the public to become more critical toward political narratives that, while rhetorically polished, may conceal powerful ideological motives beneath the surface.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative research design, as the objective is to interpret the meaning, linguistic structure, and ideological content embedded in the political speeches of world leaders. A qualitative approach is appropriate for exploring complex, contextual, and symbolic aspects of language use that cannot be captured through numerical data or statistical analysis. Rather than seeking to measure variables, this research aims to understand how ideologies are constructed, conveyed, and embedded in political discourse through strategic use of language. Therefore, this approach allows the researcher to examine speech not only as a linguistic artifact but also as a reflection of social power and ideological positioning.

The type of research is descriptive, which means the study seeks to systematically and accurately describe the linguistic and rhetorical features found in the selected political speeches. Description in this context involves not only identifying rhetorical techniques or discourse patterns, but also interpreting how these elements are strategically used to frame social issues, define political identities, and reproduce ideological worldviews. Through a descriptive lens, the research will highlight how political figures utilize discourse to establish authority, legitimize policy, and influence public perception across different sociopolitical contexts.

The data sources in this study consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data refers to official and publicly available political speeches delivered by prominent world leaders at key historical moments, such as inauguration addresses, independence declarations, and public addresses at national or international forums. Examples include Barack Obama's 2009 Inaugural Address, Soekarno's Proclamation of Indonesian Independence in 1945, Nelson Mandela's speech upon his release from prison, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Secondary data includes relevant academic literature such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, previous research, and theoretical texts on rhetoric, ideology, and critical discourse analysis.

Data collection is conducted through documentation and literature study. The documentation method involves gathering textual data from credible and authoritative sources, including government archives, international institutions (e.g., the United Nations, The White House Archives), academic databases, and digital libraries. The researcher ensures that all speech transcripts are accurate and unedited, as originally delivered. The literature study supports the theoretical foundation of the analysis, focusing on classical rhetorical theory (especially Aristotle's concepts of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*), ideological theory (e.g., Althusser, Gramsci), and frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the approaches developed by Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk.

Data analysis in this study is carried out in two integrated stages. The first stage involves rhetorical analysis, in which the researcher identifies and examines persuasive strategies employed by the speakers. This includes how they construct credibility (*ethos*), evoke emotional appeal (*pathos*), and present logical reasoning (*logos*). The analysis also

covers structural features of the speech, the use of metaphors, repetition, contrastive framing, and rhetorical questions. The second stage is critical discourse analysis (CDA), which seeks to uncover the ideological underpinnings of the texts. Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework or van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, this approach analyzes the linguistic features (text), the production and consumption of discourse (discourse practice), and the broader sociopolitical context (social practice). CDA enables the researcher to investigate how power relations, ideological positions, and social hierarchies are discursively constructed and maintained through language.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, the researcher applies multiple validation techniques. Theoretical triangulation is used by integrating multiple theoretical perspectives rhetoric, CDA, and ideology to provide a more comprehensive interpretation. The study also includes peer debriefing and academic discussion, wherein preliminary findings and analytical interpretations are shared with academic supervisors and peers for feedback and verification. Additionally, an audit trail is maintained throughout the research process, documenting the collection, organization, coding, and interpretation of data. This transparent and traceable record allows for potential replication or review by future researchers, ensuring academic rigor and accountability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Use of Rhetorical Strategies in Selected Political Speeches

No	Speaker	Speech Title	Ethos	Pathos	Logos	Dominant Rhetorical Devices
1	Barack Obama	Inaugural Address (2009)	✓	✓	✓	Repetition, Metaphor, Triads
2	Soekarno	Proclamation of Independence (1945)	✓	✓✓	✓	Antithesis, Historical Narrative
3	Nelson Mandela	Speech After Release (1990)	✓✓	✓✓	✓	Symbolism, Emotional Appeals
4	Martin Luther King Jr.	"I Have a Dream" (1963)	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	Repetition, Imagery, Allusion

Source : Author's Own Analysis

Table 2. Ideological Themes Detected in Political Speeches

No	Speaker	Speech Title	Dominant Ideology	Linguistic Evidence	Socio-Political Context
1	Martin Luther King Jr.	"I Have a Dream"	a Social justice, Anti-racism	Repetition of "I have a dream", Inclusive pronouns	U.S. Civil Rights Movement
2	Soekarno	1st June 1945 Speech	Anti-colonialism, Nationalism	Terms like "colonialism", "freedom", "unity"	Indonesian Independence Struggle
3	George W. Bush	Address after 9/11	Conservatism, Security State	Phrases like "axis of evil", "freedom is under attack"	Post-9/11 War on Terror

No	Speaker	Speech Title	Dominant Ideology	Linguistic Evidence	Socio-Political Context
4	Angela Merkel	Bundestag Speech (2015)	Humanitarianism, Europeanism	Emphasis on “solidarity”, “responsibility”	European Refugee Crisis

Source : Author’s Own Analysis

Table 3. “Us vs Them” Identity Construction in Political Discourse

No	Speech Title	In-Group ("Us")	Out-Group ("Them")	Language Used	Strategy
1	Bush’s Address	9/11 American people	Terrorists, “Axis Evil”	of Negative enemy-othering	labeling,
2	Soekarno’s Speech	1945 Indonesian people	Colonial powers	Binary	opposition, metaphor, repetition
3	Nelson 1994	Mandela All South Africans	Apartheid regime	Inclusive	narrative, redefinition of unity
4	Obama’s Victory Speech	2008 American citizens	Political cynicism/division	Reframing difference as diversity	

Source : Author’s Own Analysis

The analysis of political speeches delivered by prominent world leaders reveals significant rhetorical strategies used to convey ideology and influence public perception. From a rhetorical standpoint, the speeches are characterized by a calculated use of ethos, pathos, and logos. Speakers often begin by establishing their credibility (ethos) referring to their experience, commitment to the nation, or moral authority. This is followed by appeals to emotion (pathos) through evocative language, anecdotes, and references to national pride, trauma, or shared struggle. Finally, leaders employ logical reasoning (logos) by presenting arguments supported by facts, figures, or historical references to justify policies or political positions. For example, Barack Obama’s inaugural address balanced emotional resonance with logical structure, while Soekarno’s proclamation of independence used strong pathos to mobilize nationalist sentiment.

The ideological structures embedded in these speeches are often both explicit and implicit. Leaders frame their message around particular values such as nationalism, unity, freedom, or justice, which reflect their ideological stance. These ideologies are conveyed through narrative structures that often include historical recounting, national symbols, or future-oriented vision statements. In many cases, binary oppositions such as “us versus them,” “freedom versus oppression,” or “truth versus manipulation” are used to subtly position the speaker’s side as morally superior. For example, Winston Churchill framed World War II as a moral battle against tyranny, while Nelson Mandela’s post-apartheid speeches invoked justice and reconciliation as central ideological tenets. An important aspect found in the discourse is the representation of self and others.

Political leaders often present themselves as unifying figures, saviors of the nation, or the embodiment of the people’s will. Conversely, political opponents, foreign enemies, or ideological adversaries are depicted as threats to peace, prosperity, or moral order. These portrayals are rarely neutral they carry evaluative language that shapes audience perception. Through repetition and symbolic labeling, these speeches construct a dominant narrative about who belongs and who is excluded, who should be trusted and

who should be feared. This strategy was especially evident in George W. Bush's post-9/11 speeches, where "the axis of evil" became a defining ideological marker.

Language is not only used to persuade but also to reproduce power and dominance. Modal verbs such as *must*, *should*, *will*, and *cannot* are frequently employed to command, predict, or limit options, directing public opinion toward certain actions while subtly dismissing alternatives. This use of modality functions as a mechanism of control, where the speaker not only informs but also instructs and restricts thought. Moreover, metaphors and symbolic imagery such as "building a nation," "the war on terror," or "healing the wounds of history" play a central role in reinforcing ideological narratives by simplifying complex issues into emotionally resonant frames.

The socio-political context in which each speech was delivered plays a pivotal role in shaping its discourse. Speeches given during times of war, political transition, or national crisis tend to contain more emotional appeals and heightened ideological messages. For instance, speeches during post-colonial struggles (e.g., by Soekarno or Kwame Nkrumah) emphasized resistance, sovereignty, and anti-imperialism, whereas speeches in Western liberal democracies often highlight democratic values, economic growth, or human rights. This shows that the discourse is not created in a vacuum but is influenced by historical pressures, cultural expectations, and political goals.

When comparing multiple speeches across countries and cultures, several discursive patterns emerge. Leaders from developing or postcolonial nations tend to emphasize identity, independence, and collective memory, while those from global powers focus more on global leadership, diplomacy, or liberal values. Despite these differences, a commonality is the strategic construction of hope, vision, and national identity tools that transcend borders and act as universal elements of political rhetoric.

Lastly, the study finds that these ideologically charged speeches have a considerable impact on public perception and international image. The way a leader frames issues through discourse can shape global narratives about a country's values, its stance on world affairs, and its legitimacy in the eyes of others. Political speeches not only impact domestic constituents but also serve as tools of diplomacy and national image-building in international forums. In the age of global media and digital dissemination, a well-crafted speech can serve as soft power, influencing not just policy but also international opinion and alliances.

The findings of this research affirm the relevance and applicability of both classical rhetorical theory and critical discourse analysis (CDA) in understanding the ideological dimensions of political speech. The application of ethos, pathos, and logos remains central to the persuasive function of political discourse. Leaders build ethos by aligning themselves with national values, referencing personal sacrifice, or invoking their role as protectors of the people. For example, Nelson Mandela frequently emphasized his decades-long imprisonment as proof of his moral authority. Pathos is deployed through emotionally charged language and appeals to shared historical trauma, such as when Soekarno invoked the collective suffering of Indonesians under colonialism. Logos, while often less emphasized in emotionally oriented speeches, is used strategically to give legitimacy to arguments through statistics, historical references, or rational cause-effect relationships. These findings are consistent with Aristotelian rhetoric, which positions persuasion not only as a technical act of speaking but as a strategic act of engaging with audiences' identities, emotions, and logic simultaneously.

In parallel, the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) particularly as outlined by Fairclough and van Dijk proves highly effective in uncovering the underlying power relations and ideological structures embedded in political texts. CDA views discourse as both shaped by and shaping social structures, ideologies, and institutional power. For

example, Barack Obama's speeches often reinforce neoliberal ideologies of individual responsibility and meritocracy, even while cloaked in the language of hope and inclusion. Through CDA, it becomes clear that such speeches subtly reinforce existing social hierarchies while appearing progressive. This aligns with Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, where language legitimizes domination not by force but through consent by making certain worldviews appear natural or common sense.

This study also reveals that language is not simply descriptive but constitutive political speech constructs reality rather than merely reflecting it. The careful use of lexical choices, metaphorical frames (e.g., "war on terror," "healing a nation"), and narrative structures all serve to shape public consciousness. Leaders use such strategies not just to inform, but to define what should be feared, desired, or celebrated. The metaphor of "building bridges," used by figures like Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, frames political unity as a noble and moral task, while metaphors like "enemy within" or "cancer of extremism" used in more aggressive rhetoric dehumanize and other political opponents or minority groups. These discursive constructions are powerful because they tap into unconscious cultural schemas and emotional registers, guiding audience interpretation in subtle but effective ways.

Interestingly, while political and cultural contexts differ greatly, this research finds several common rhetorical and ideological patterns across global leaders. Most speeches construct a narrative of collective identity ("we the people") juxtaposed against a threatening "other," whether internal or external. This "us vs. them" binary serves as a central ideological device, simplifying complex socio-political issues into moral dichotomies. In George W. Bush's speeches post-9/11, this binary took the form of "freedom vs. evil," while in Hugo Chávez's speeches, it appeared as "sovereign nation vs. imperialist forces." Such binaries polarize discourse and delegitimize alternative perspectives, often silencing dissent or justifying coercive measures. The ideological implications of this pattern are profound, as it not only mobilizes support but creates a framework for exclusion, marginalization, and often, aggression.

The role of context both historical and socio-political is also pivotal. Political speeches do not exist in a vacuum; they are deeply informed by the events, crises, and ideological battles of their time. For example, speeches during the Cold War were framed around capitalism vs. communism, while speeches in the post-9/11 era focus on security, terror, and the global Muslim identity. Leaders from postcolonial states tend to emphasize national sovereignty, anti-imperialism, and historical justice as seen in speeches by leaders like Soekarno, Jomo Kenyatta, and Patrice Lumumba. Conversely, leaders of Western democracies frequently invoke liberal democratic values, international cooperation, and the rule of law. Thus, the speech becomes both a response to and a construction of its time both reflecting societal anxieties and seeking to direct them.

The impact of political rhetoric is not only symbolic but also material. Speeches can mobilize collective action, shift public policy, and shape international diplomacy. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech became a defining moment in the civil rights movement not merely because of its eloquence, but because it catalyzed social change. Similarly, Barack Obama's campaign rhetoric of "hope" and "change" fundamentally altered public discourse and helped construct his image as a transformative leader, even if some argue the ideological structure of his policies remained centrist. Through repetitive use of particular narratives and symbols, leaders can inscribe new meanings into national identity, reframe history, or legitimize controversial policies. In this way, rhetoric is not simply performance it is a vehicle of power and ideology with far-reaching consequences.

Finally, this study raises important ethical and civic questions about the role of political discourse in modern society. In an era of media saturation and algorithmic amplification, political speeches now reach global audiences instantly and are often repurposed in fragmented forms across platforms like Twitter, TikTok, or YouTube. This raises concerns about manipulation, misinformation, and ideological indoctrination. Citizens must develop critical discourse awareness the ability to decode not only what is said but how it is said, why, and with what effect. Political language can unite or divide, liberate or oppress, depending on how it is used and by whom. As such, understanding the rhetoric and discourse of political leaders is not merely an academic pursuit but a crucial component of democratic literacy in the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that political speeches by world leaders are not merely tools of communication, but powerful instruments of ideological construction and social influence. Through the strategic use of rhetorical devices such as ethos, pathos, and logos and discursive structures rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), political figures shape public perception, legitimize authority, and construct narratives of national identity. The findings reveal that ideology is embedded both implicitly and explicitly within language, often manifested through binary oppositions, metaphorical framing, and symbolic representation. Regardless of cultural or geopolitical context, political leaders consistently utilize language to mobilize support, define moral boundaries, and construct collective identities. Moreover, the socio-historical context surrounding each speech significantly influences the rhetorical strategies and ideological content employed. Ultimately, this research highlights the importance of critical awareness toward political discourse, as language not only reflects but also reproduces systems of power. Understanding these dynamics is essential for fostering informed, democratic, and critically engaged societies.

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